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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2027  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS GOVERNOR ROSALES

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Richard Downes  
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### Summary

¶1. (C) Zulia Governor and unsuccessful presidential candidate Manuel Rosales told the Ambassador on December 13 he was optimistic regarding the opposition's chances to win additional mayoral and governor positions in October 2008, but recognized the opposition faced significant hurdles. He was guarded about his own plans but noted his party, Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), would continue to work with the student movement and the pro-government party Podemos. Rosales believes the Antonini case has caused a growing public belief that corruption is bad under Chavez. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Zulia Governor and unsuccessful presidential candidate Manuel Rosales Guerrero made a December 13 courtesy call on the Ambassador. In a discussion that also included DCM and PolCouns, Rosales said he was not surprised by the results of the December 2 constitutional referendum. He credited the victory to the work of the parties in defending the vote and the efforts of university students and Podemos in convincing Chavista supporters to vote against the reforms. He said the opposition would build on this momentum and capture additional governorships and mayoral positions in the October 2008 state and local elections. (Note: The opposition presently has 2 of 23 governorships and 67 of the 337 mayoral seats. End Note).

¶3. (C) Rosales acknowledged that the parties would face substantial challenges in the next campaign, particularly in ensuring unified slates for each race. He said the parties' work would begin in January focusing on building a strong national network, expanding efforts in the barrios, where Chavez has traditionally drawn much of his strength, and ensuring the opposition has trained poll watchers and witnesses available for all the polling places. Rosales noted that the opposition was now in a position to exploit widening ruptures and disagreements within Chavismo.

¶4. (C) Regarding his own political future, Rosales was guarded. (The two-term governor cannot run for re-election next Fall due to term limits.) He said he would focus on building and leading his party, UNT, and in coordinating with other parties for the elections.

¶5. (C) Rosales credited the student movement for injecting new life into Venezuelan politics. Noting that they were a diverse group, he said the parties would work with them to try to harness this energy. He indicated most of the leaders had ties to political parties, particularly UNT, Primero

Justicia and COPEI.

¶6. (C) Rosales raised the announcement of arrests in Florida related to the August 4, 2007 seizure in Argentina of USD 800,000 in the luggage of Guido Antonini. He said this was continuing evidence of the level of political and personal corruption in the Chavez administration. He viewed the August 4 event as particularly important in transforming opinion in Venezuela. Before that time, the polls indicated that the average Venezuela thought that corruption was worse under pre-Chavez governments. Since August, polls show government corruption is perceived to be as bad or to have grown worse under Chavez.

¶7. (C) Comment: Rosales, while optimistic after the recent opposition win, was realistic about the obstacles that the parties face in countering the authoritarian direction of the Chavez government. He faces an uncertain personal future as he can not run for re-election and will lose much of his influence and resources once he leaves office. Although he has lost political clout since his December 2006 defeat, Rosales will likely remain the leader of his party and probably still sees himself as a future presidential candidate.

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